The Builder.

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THE scenery which has been painted for Mr. Planché's elegant and right-witty Easter piece, at the Royal Lyceum Theatre—"Theseus and Ariadne"—is perfectly beautiful, and fills the mind of the spectator with the pleasantest and most poetical notions. The execution of it proves Mr. W. Beverly to be a true artist, and places him in the front rank of his profession. He has caught the spirit of the able author, and developed it worthily. The opening scene of the ocean,—only the ocean, and quite calm,—has an atmosphere which gives it a great charm; but that which succeeds, as the vessel bearing the chivalrous Theseus approaches the port and city of Heraclium, in the Island of Crete, is a triumph: the temples and palaces on the heights, long arcaded perspectives and magnificent columned porticoes, with the vessel and the quay, form a wonderfully fine picture, and make us wish that our architects would take some lessons from our scene-painters, and now and then give the precedent-rein to their imagination and see where it would lead them, and what, unshackled, it would do for them.

And yet we are about to cavil,—though our cavil shall be no dispraise in the case. "Pisistratus," says Mr. Caxton (a bookworm in a clever sketch in the current number of *Blackwood*, who wakes up one morning and finds his son so named), "Pisistratus christened! Pisistratus, who lived six hundred years before Christ was born. Good heavens, madam! You have made me the father of an anachronism."

And so our artist's desire for splendour (not to attribute to him either want of thought or want of knowledge) has made him the father of an anachronism. The structures are Italian, not Grecian—still less the Grecian of the time of Theseus, and that expedition to Crete which, as Bulwer says in his "Athens," is "indissolubly entwined with immortal features of love and poetry." This occurred, as all our schoolboy readers know, in the *heroic* times—the time before dates were—pretty nearly as many hundred years before the Great Birth as we live after it, when structures were massive and simple; and, at all events, there were no triumphal arches and continued arcades.

This is a very common mistake, and, in the present instance, a venial one. In a burlesque, wherein Mr. Charles Mathews, as that ancient architect Dædalus, gives reasons for wearing, with a semi-Greek dress, a pair of white-satin bear-riches (shall we call them, for ears polite), —to talk of an anachronism is to talk nonsense, the artist may say: still, the arch and other marks of a different age might as well have been avoided, instead of being everywhere superabundantly used. The famous labyrinth, for example, is represented as formed by a continued series of arches stretching round and about in mazy lines; and another scene represents a regularly arched dungeon of the most approved construction.

We make these remarks simply as suggestive to stage artists, and not to detract in any degree from the praise due to Mr. Beverly in the present case. What some of our scene painters do in respect of mixing dates at times is illustrated to the life in a capital "humorous confusion" which Planché puts into the mouth of Mr. Mathews in the piece in question, wherein the latter sings, in the short, sharp, quick, clear way, peculiarly his own:—

"I dreamt I was walking with Homer, and talking
The very best Greek I was able—was able,
When Guy, Earl of Warwick, with Johnson and Garrick,
Would dance a Scotch reel on the table—the table.
Then Hannibal rising declared 'twas surprising
That gentlemen made such a riot—a riot,
And sent in a bustle to beg Lord John Russell
Would hasten, and make 'em all quiet—all quiet."

The application of the lines is too evident to need setting forth.

The ancients never had such scene painting as we have, but their artists were called to account when they went wrong: take the following passage from Vitruvius, as translated by Mr. Gwilt, in proof of this. Our author is speaking of various inconsistencies in decoration, and says,—

"And yet the public, so far from discouraging these falsehoods, are delighted with them, not for a moment considering whether such things could exist. Hence the minds of the multitude, misled by improper judges, do not discern that which is founded on reason and the rules of propriety. No picture should be tolerated but those established on the basis of truth; and although admirably painted, they should be immediately discarded, if they transgress the rules of propriety and perspicuity as respects the subject. At Tralles, a town of Lydia, when Apaturius, of Alabanda, had painted an elegant scene for the little theatre, which they called *ἐκκυκλησιαστήριον*, in which, instead of columns, they introduced statues and centaurs to support the epistylium, the circular end of the dome, and angles of the pediment, and ornamented the cornice with lions' heads, all which are appropriate as ornaments of the roofing and eaves of edifices,—he painted above them, in the episcenium, a repetition of the domes, porticoes, half pediments, and other part of roofs and their ornaments. Upon the exhibition of this scene, which on account of its richness gave great satisfaction, every one was ready to applaud, when Licinius, the mathematician, advanced, and thus addressed them:—'The Alabandines are sufficiently informed in civil matters, but are without judgment on subjects of less moment; for the statues in their gymnasium are all in the attitude of pleading causes, whilst those in the forum are holding the discus, or in the attitude of running, or playing with balls, so that the impropriety of the attitudes of the figures in such places disgraces the city. Let us, therefore, be careful, by our treatment of the scene of Apaturius, not to deserve the appellation of Alabandines or Abderites, for who among you would place columns or pediments on the tiles which cover the roofs of your homes? These things stand on the floors, not on the tiles. If, then, approbation is conferred on representations in painting which cannot exist in fact, we of this city shall be like those who for a similar error are accounted illiterate.' Apaturius dared not reply, but took down and altered the scene, so as to make it consistent with truth, and then it was approved. O, that the Gods would restore Licinius to life, that he might correct the folly and fashionable inconsistency in our stucco work."

We began with praise, and will end with it. "The Vines before the Temple of Bacchus" is a picture of the highest merit: its sunny richness is glorious. The arrangements generally of this scene, the procession of bacchanals, and the "mad riot," take the spectator back to the days of Virgil and Ovid, and the deep myths which they so finely set forth.

THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE ART-UNION OF LONDON.

IF the Lords of the Privy Council for Trade had been present at Drury Lane Theatre on Tuesday last, when the general meeting of the members of the Art-Union of London was held, the unanimous condemnation of their interference, and the opinions expressed by men of all classes, lawyers as well as art-lovers, of its illegality as well as its inexpediency and evil tendency, could scarcely have failed to produce some effect, and lead them, at all events, to avoid doing further mischief: of this, however, on another occasion.

The house was crowded in every part, and a platform, erected in the "circle" formed for the French horse-riders now exhibiting there, was occupied by the council, scrutineers, &c.

His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge took the chair at twelve o'clock, and said—Ladies and Gentlemen, I shall not detain you long, inasmuch as I am sure you will naturally be anxious to hear the report of the council of this excellent institution read. One thing, however, I am sorry to say, and that is, that our subscriptions for the current year have very much fallen off—to the extent, I fear, of 5,000*l*. The reasons of this circumstance will appear in the report, and that you may understand them, I will at once call upon Mr. Godwin to read it.

Mr. Godwin, F.R.S., honorary secretary, then read the following

REPORT.

The council of the Art-Union of London have been accustomed, from the foundation of the society, to announce at each anniversary so large an increase on the amount of the preceding year's subscription, that they come before you on the present occasion with less elation than the amount which they have to report would amply justify, but for such previous great success.

The total sum subscribed which they have to report at this, the twelfth annual meeting, is 12,571*l*. 5*s*., being 5,000*l*. less than the amount last year.

This great diminution must be attributed to various concurring causes. A season of commercial embarrassment, and the exciting events of the period (events which will make it memorable in the annals of the world), would suffice to account for part of the falling off. The council, however, are compelled to attribute it mainly to circumstances of more immediate connection with the society.

In their last report, they stated to the subscribers that on the 1st of December, 1846, "The Art-Union of London was incorporated by royal charter,—long, it is hoped, to exercise a beneficial educational influence; to open the enjoyments of art to thousands, to whom they have been hitherto denied; to spread abroad a knowledge and love of art; to offer encouragement to artists beyond that afforded by private purchasers, as well by forming a more appreciating public as by the provision of funds, and so to assist materially the progress and elevation of the fine arts in the United Kingdom." They hoped that the difficulties which had been most unnecessarily thrown in their way, and had caused them much labour and anxiety, were removed, and that they would be able quietly thenceforth to carry out the great purposes of an institution which had spread itself, for good, throughout the empire and its colonies, and the value and importance of which had been admitted on all sides, even by those who in the first instance, through misapprehension or want of information, were opposed to it.

The council were, therefore, much surprised on receiving, in October last, a communication from the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, claiming a right of interference which extended to changing the constitution of the association, under clauses in the charter introduced by your council themselves, with the view simply of preventing the perversion of the association from its legitimate purposes by individuals for their private gain.

In this communication the Board of Trade proposed these alterations:—

1st. That the whole number of works of art from which the prizes were to be taken should be selected by a committee, instead of permitting the prizeholders to select, as here-

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